

General Order

Houston Police Department



ISSUE DATE:

May 2, 2019

NO.

600-31

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 600-31, dated November 25, 2013

SUBJECT: BURGLAR, HOLDUP, AND PANIC ALARMS

POLICY

The department shall not impose a penalty for responding to the first three false burglar alarm calls or the first false holdup or panic alarm call at a permitted site during a 12-month period. The department shall respond to all holdup and panic alarm calls regardless of permit status. Holdup and panic alarms shall never be placed in a "do not respond" status.

This General Order applies to all employees.

DEFINITIONS

Alarm Clearance Code. The manner in which an alarm call is cleared by the responding officer. With no exception, the responding officer shall use only one of the following alarm clearance codes:

- a. **Exceptional Alarm (XCP).** An alarm that is activated by weather or other natural phenomenon.
- b. **False Alarm (FAL).** An alarm that is not the result of weather, natural phenomenon, or an emergency or threat of emergency of the kind for which the alarm system was designed to give notice.
- c. **Not Within HPD Jurisdiction (JUR).** The location of the call for service is not within the city limits of Houston.
- d. **Ticket (TIC).** An alarm that is false and the responding officer issues the alarm user a citation for non-emergency activation of a burglar, holdup, or panic alarm.
- e. **True Alarm (TAL).** An alarm that results from the activation of an alarm system in response to an emergency or threat of emergency.
- f. **Unable to Locate (UTL).** The responding officer is unable to locate the address indicated on the call for service.

Alarm Permit. A certificate issued by the City of Houston's Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA) Department authorizing the operation of a specific alarm system for a 12-month period from the date of issuance.

Alarm Site. The specific property or area of the premises on or within which an alarm system is installed.

Alarm System. Any mechanical, electrical, electronic or radio-controlled alarm device or equipment that emits, transmits, or relays a signal that is designed or intended to produce an

alarm notification. Alarm system includes, but is not limited to, silent, audible, panic, holdup, burglar and local alarm systems. The term does not include a personal emergency response system alarm, a fire alarm system designed solely to detect fire or smoke or an alarm installed in a motor vehicle solely to prevent theft of the vehicle.

Alarm System Business (a.k.a. Alarm Company). A business or individual who sells, leases, rents, maintains, installs, services, monitors, or responds to alarm systems as a livelihood.

Burglar Alarm System. An alarm system designed to prevent or detect an unauthorized entry or attempted entry into the alarm site and transmit a signal to an alarm system business.

Holdup or Panic Alarm System. An alarm system designed to be activated by human action to give notification of a robbery or attempted robbery or to summon police aid for a perceived life-threatening reason by transmitting a signal to an alarm system business.

Non-Permitted Alarm System. An alarm system for which no valid alarm permit has been issued. This also includes alarm systems with permits that have been revoked.

1 AUTHORITY

The department derives the authority to regulate burglar, holdup, and panic alarm systems from Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 214 and the City of Houston Code of Ordinances, Chapter 11, Article III.

City ordinances require that all burglar, holdup, and panic alarm systems within the city limits of Houston have a permit to operate and that the permit be kept on premises and available for inspection by a police officer investigating alarm calls. Exceptions to the permit requirement are an alarm system:

- a. Installed on a motor vehicle.
- b. Designed so notification is not given to the police until after the occupants or an agent of the owner or lessee have inspected the alarm site and determined there is physical evidence showing the alarm was the result of criminal activity, and the occupants or their agent is at the scene and able to grant access to the alarm site.
- c. Designed solely to detect smoke or give notice of fire or smoke.

An "exempt permit" is required for an alarm system installed on premises occupied by the United States government or the government of the state of Texas, the City of Houston, or any county. Officers shall *not* use the Ticket (TIC) alarm clearance code to clear alarm calls to such locations.

State law requires a police response within 30 minutes after an alarm notification in order to classify the alarm as false for assessment of false alarm response fees. This does not preclude issuance of citations to owners or operators of non-permitted alarm systems that are not reached within 30 minutes after alarm notification.

2 DO NOT RESPOND STATUS AND PENALTIES

Owners or operators of non-permitted burglar, holdup, or panic alarm systems are subject to citations for failing to obtain the proper permit and to alarm response fees from the City of Houston beginning with the first false alarm response.

Burglar Alarms

A burglar alarm permit holder shall be penalized for a false alarm call only if the Police Department responds to the alarm site within 30 minutes after the alarm notification. A permit holder shall be charged a penalty based on a progressive table for each false burglar alarm call in excess of three during the preceding 12-month period.

The alarm permit for a burglar alarm system that has had eight or more false alarms during the preceding 12-month period shall be revoked and may be placed in a "do not respond" status. Once a burglar alarm system has been placed in a "do not respond" status, a police officer shall not be dispatched to a burglar alarm call from an alarm system at that site. If the owner/operator of a non-permitted alarm site insists that a patrol unit check their alarm, a Patrol Desk Unit or a dispatch supervisor shall notify the owner/operator of the non-response procedure and cancel the call. Emergency Communications Division shall not dispatch a patrol officer to a non-permitted alarm solely for the reason that their alarm went off without the owner/operator being onsite at the time of the call. In the event an owner/operator calls the Houston Emergency Center to request an officer to check their non-permitted alarm, they must be at the location to meet the owner. The only exception to the "do not respond" policy is an alarm reported by an individual not affiliated with an alarm company. Any time an alarm is reported by an individual (not an alarm company representative) a police officer shall be dispatched, regardless of the permit status at the alarm site.

Holdup and Panic Alarms

A holdup or panic alarm permit holder shall be penalized for a false alarm call only if the Police Department responds to the alarm site within 30 minutes after the alarm notification. A permit holder shall be charged a penalty based on a progressive table for each false holdup or panic alarm call in excess of one during the preceding 12-month period.

Holdup and panic alarm calls shall receive a police response regardless of permit status.

3 PROCEDURES

Responding Officers

Officers dispatched to alarm calls shall respond in an expedient manner, consistent with the response priority assigned to the alarm type.

Alarm calls shall be cleared as Exceptional Alarm, False Alarm, Not Within HPD Jurisdiction, Ticket, True Alarm, or Unable to Locate. These six alarm clearance codes are detailed in the *Definitions* section of this General Order.

Officers clearing alarm calls with the Exceptional Alarm clearance code shall provide an explanation for the clearance code via the mobile computing device (MCD). An alarm call shall not be cleared until the responding officer has physically checked the alarm location.

If an owner or operator of an alarm system is at the scene of a non-permitted alarm system, the responding officer should issue the appropriate citation.

Officers should document the proper identification of any person found at the scene of a false alarm in the call for service slip via the MCD. The person's identifying information shall be recorded along with an explanation for the false alarm, which should be provided by the alarm user (e.g., system malfunction, user error, or forgot password.)

If an owner or operator of an alarm system is not at the scene when an officer responds to an alarm call that is determined to be a false alarm, the officer shall place a notice or decal at or on the doorway or principal entry to such site noting the responding officer's name, unit number, incident number, date, and time. The Burglary and Theft Division, Alarm Enforcement Detail (AED) shall provide patrol divisions with decals for this purpose.

Responding officers shall use resources immediately available to them before contacting AED for assistance.

Patrol Supervisors

Patrol sergeants shall monitor burglar alarm calls for service. It is a patrol supervisor's discretion to cancel an alarm call at a site that has demonstrated a history of producing excessive false burglar alarms.

The dispatcher may also request a patrol supervisor to examine the history of a location for authorization to cancel an alarm call at a site that has a history of false alarms.

Emergency Communications Division

As the first step in the police response process, Houston Emergency Center call takers field all police response requests from alarm system businesses to alarm sites. Call takers adhere to City of Houston Code of Ordinances, Chapter 11, Article III, Section 11-72 (Mandatory Verification of Burglar Alarm) when receiving burglar alarm calls from alarm system businesses.

If an alarm location has been placed in a "do not respond" status and a burglar alarm call to that location is received, the Houston Emergency Center call taker will clear the call as "cancelled." However, an on-duty officer shall be dispatched to all holdup and panic alarm calls regardless of permit status. Calls for service to holdup or panic alarms shall not be cancelled and a police response shall be assigned promptly.

Dispatch personnel shall serve as the resource center for alarm-related data and information. They shall provide officers with information on alarm system response status.

Alarm Enforcement Detail (AED)

The Burglary and Theft Division, Alarm Enforcement Detail has the primary responsibility of enforcing the local alarm code. AED classified personnel are responsible for investigating

complaints of alarm sites not in compliance with the local alarm code. This may require the issuance of citations for violations brought to their attention.

In addition, AED personnel shall assist patrol officers in resolving problems of nuisance alarm sites. AED personnel shall also advise patrol officers on the scene of calls for service to burglar, holdup, or panic alarm sites, as needed.

The AED is also the department's liaison to the City of Houston ARA Department and the alarm system industry.

4 REFERENCE MATERIAL

City of Houston Code of Ordinances, Chapter 11, Burglar and Fire Alarm Protective Services, Article III. Burglar Alarms, Panic Alarms and Other Similar Alarm Systems

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 72: National Fire Alarm Code

Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 214


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